MARCIA AND THE MAJOR

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J. L. HARBOUR

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"'HELLO!' CALLED OUT THE MAJOR CHEERILY." Page 43.

MÁRCIA AND THE MAJOR.

BY

J.L.HARBOUR.

New York.
Thomas Y. Crowell & Co.
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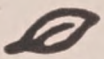
MARCIA AND THE MAJOR

A STORY OF LIFE IN THE ROCKIES

BY

J. Lee HARBOUR



NEW YORK:
THOMAS Y. CROWELL & CO.
PUBLISHERS

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CONTENTS.

PAGE

I.

THE MAJOR 5

II.

CLOUD HAVEN 9

III.

MARCIA 13

IV.

MARCIA'S PA 17

V.

EVENING JOURNEYS 22

VI.

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE 26

VII.

THE MAJOR'S "PIECE OF POETRY" 33

VIII.

A BOARDER AT CLOUD HAVEN 38

IX.

DORIS 42

PAGE

X.

An Interesting Advertisement 49

XI.

A Caller at Cloud Haven 56

XII.

How Don Returned 62

XIII.

For the Major 69

XIV.

In Cloud Haven Shelter 75

XV.

Marcia's Great-Uncle 78

Marcia and the Major.

I.

THE MAJOR.

THE Major was a Forty-Niner. That means he was one of the men who had crossed the great western plains in the year 1849, bound for the newly-discovered gold and silver mines in the Rockies.

It was worth while to hear the Major tell of that trip from Missouri to Colorado. The Major had ridden most of the way astride the back of a fleet-footed pony, while his young wife and their tiny baby girl had ridden in the big, lumbering wagon. The Major's wife sat on the high front seat of the wagon with her baby girl propped up safely with pillows by her side. There were two or three cows to be driven behind the wagon, and the Major drove them on his pony, while his wife drove the pair of big bony horses hitched to the wagon. They were weeks and months crossing.

"And the trip was too much for the little

one," the Major would say on the rare occasions when he spoke of his wife and baby. "She never was over an' above strong, an' I've wished a million times that I had put off crossin' the plains until she was older an' stronger. It was a turrible hot summer that year. An' only them that knows from experience can tell just how blazin' hot it gits out there on the plains along in July and August. You can travel for miles an' miles without seein' a single tree, an' all the shade we could git in was the scanty shade cast by the shadder of the wagon. Ruthie, the baby, got thinner an' thinner. We went sixty-five miles out of our way to git her to a doctor; but the stuff he give her didn't do her any good, and her ma an' me didn't have any little gal when we got out here to the mountains."

The Major's eyes would grow moist, and his voice unsteady, when he told this part of his life-story, even when he was a bent and grizzled old man who had lived in the mountains so long that he was called an Old-Timer.

Down in the shade and silence of Moss Rock Canon, near a solitary deserted cabin with a sunken roof, was a grave close to the bank of a noisy little mountain stream that broke in foamy waves over gray and shining bowlders. This deserted cabin was seventy-five miles from the Major's home away up the rocky slope of Baldy Mountain, but every spring and fall the Major came to the lonely grave and put it in what he called "apple-pie order." It was

inclosed within a neat little wall of moss-covered stones picked up in the canon, and there was a scanty growth of grass in the soil that the Major had brought in bags a distance of more than a mile and spread over and around the grave of Ruthie's mother.

"We done our first housekeeping here in the mountains in that tumble-down old cabin," the Major would say. "It was a lonesome sort of a place; but it was July when we come there and the canon was lookin' its best, and I reckoned on strikin' it rich that summer and then goin' back to our old home an' our kinfolks in the States. But things didn't go my way. The minin' claims I staked out didn't pan out as I reckoned they would. Fact is, they didn't pan out as much as I put into them if I counted my time anything, an' when winter come I was poorer than when I begun to prospect there. And when spring come I had lost more than any mine on earth is wuth, for Ruthie's ma was layin' in that grave out across the Saranac Creek."

It would take a good many pages for me to tell you of all of the good deeds the Major had done "for Ruthie's sake." The Major had been a good deal of a rover for a long time after Ruthie and her mother had gone from him, and whenever he had been where there were children he had always "taken to them."

"I think the Major would git up in the dead o' night an' crawl five miles on his hands an'

knees to help a kid out o' trouble," said big Hank Morris, who would himself have been the last man in the world to have allowed a child to suffer.

"You remember," continued Hank, "how the Major, one o' the most peaceable men that ever drawed breath, went stalkin' down into Camp Fancy when he heard that there was a man there named Jake Tripp who was cruel mean to his three little motherless children? I tell ye if the Major didn't lay down the law to Jake Tripp now! Of course Jake was a big coward. Any man who will abuse wimmen an' children is a coward; an' when the Major bore down on Jake's cabin, an' grabbed him an' shuk him, an' told him all he lotted on doin' if he ever abused one o' them children any more, I tell you Jake begged off for all he was wuth, an' his poor little younguns got good treatment after that.

"An' when Jake got drowned over there in Cinnamon River the Major went around among the boys an' raised money to send the three youngsters back to their gran'mammy in Ohio; an' the Major took 'em down to Denver himself, an' got their tickets, an' put 'em in a parlor car in charge of the conductor, an' started 'em off with candy 'an nuts an' bananers an' other stuff enough to kill em 'fore their gran'mammy could rescue 'em. That's the Major all over!"

II.

CLOUD HAVEN.

FOR years the home of the Major had been in a snug little cabin of two rooms, built by his own hand, half way up the rocky slope of old Baldy Mountain.

Here the Major lived alone.

Far down in the narrow gulch below this little house perched on a shelf of rock, far down a winding trail, was a small mining-camp of forty or fifty rude cabins scattered up and down on the rocky banks of a noisy stream called Roaring Fork. The name of the camp was Silver Queen, which was a very high-sounding name for such a poverty-stricken little place. But the time had been when it was thought that Silver Queen would be one of the greatest mining-camps in the world, and the whole gulch had been alive with busy, eager, hopeful men digging into the granite ledges for the hidden veins of silver that very few of them ever found.

Silver Queen had been the cause of a very deceiving "boom." Nearly all of the hundreds of miners who had come to it in eager haste

soon took their departure. They went away saying a good many harsh things about the camp, and about those who had started the "boom" that had caused so many men to come on a "wild-goose chase" to Roaring Fork Gulch.

Most of the men went by the cabin of the Major when they came to the camp and when they left it; and some stopped to have a chat with the Major. He was generally sitting on the bench beside his cabin door, smoking his pipe, where he could look down upon the camp below.

"I could of told ye there wa'n't no silver veins round here worth a body breakin' their necks to try to find," the Major would say. "I've lived here, off an' on, fer more than twenty years, an' stiddy now goin' on to sixteen years, an' there aint a square quarter of a mile around here that I aint looked over an' into. And I said when they started this boom bizness that they was startin' it on nothin'. I hate to see so many folks disapp'inted, I do so. I guess there are a lot o' folks down there in Silver Queen who are too pore to git away, and they'll half starve to death if they stay. It makes it mighty hard fer wimmen an' little folkses. Men ought to have better sense than to bring wimmen an' children to sich a place as this. But then I reckon they thought it was fer the best, like I thought when I brought my wife an' little Ruthie from a comfortable home back in old Missoury to this country."

But the men who looked about while they listened thought the Major had a pretty comfortable home on Old Baldy. Strangers who saw the inside of the Major's cabin, and particularly women, were surprised at its neatness and order. Sometimes they would speak about it. Then the Major would say: "I was brought up to be clean an' decent, an' there aint no excuse for folks bein' dirty with soap so cheap and water so plenty."

Truly the two rooms of the Major's cabin were as clean as soap and water could make them, and everything was just where it should be. There was a big fireplace in one end of what the Major called his "livin' room," and it was cool enough every night in the year to make it pleasant to have a fire on the hearth. The floor was almost entirely covered with bear and mountain-lion skins, and in front of the fireplace was a rude but wonderfully comfortable couch covered with skins and gay-colored Navajo Indian blankets.

There were two small windows of four lights each in the room; and the fact that there were spotlessly white curtains before these windows, and that in each of them were pots of thrifty geraniums, had caused some of the miners to say, "I declare if the Major aint a reg'lar old granny, an' fussier than any old maid!"

But the men did not like him any the less if he was an "old granny," and none of them ever refused an invitation to a meal with the Major.

It was sure to be a cleaner and better cooked meal than they would get in their own cabins.

The Major was not at all of a poetical turn of mind, and it was therefore a little strange that he called his mountain home by the fanciful name of Cloud Haven.

Once, when some one had asked him why he had given his home this name, he said, "Well, I dunno jess why. The name come to me one day when I was standin' in my cabin door watchin' the clouds floatin' around down thar in the gulch above the Roarin' Fork. You see, thar's often clouds below me as well as above me way up here, an' sometimes the clouds come right down around me; and I have such a comfortable little haven of rest up here, that I jess thought I'd call it Cloud Haven, even if it is a fancy name."

III.

MARCIA.

It was at the close of a day in the early fall. The sun, a great flaming ball, was near to dropping behind the summit of far-away Greylock, and the gulch was filling with long, black shadows. The Major was sitting on the bench by his door, after having washed his few supper dishes and tidied up his cabin. He had cooked his supper over a fire in the fireplace instead of on the little sheet-iron stove that stood in a corner of the room, and now the rosy light of the flame on the hearth shone out through the cabin door.

Night came on very fast after the flaming ball dropped behind the mountain. Within ten minutes the Major could no longer see the little cabins down in Silver Queen. Five minutes later the whole gulch was dark, and a great silence seemed to have fallen upon the world.

Presently the stillness was broken by a sudden rising of the wind, then the Major got up, shivering slightly.

"There'll be snow flyin' before mornin', even if it still is October. Guess I'll go in by the

fire. A fire in the fireplace will go good to-night."

Before the Major removed his stout boots, he did something that he had done many, many times when he was sitting down for the evening before his cabin fire. He went into the inner room and drew a small and battered old hair-covered trunk from underneath the snug bunk, filled with blankets and furry skins, in which he slept.

The little old trunk, with the hair nearly all worn off and many heads of the brass nails missing, had come across the plains in the covered wagon with the Major. Unlocking it, the Major took out a square pasteboard box which he carried into the firelit room. He did not light his candle, but sat down in the glow of the flames with the box in his lap.

Lifting off the cover of the box, he took from it a tiny scarlet merino baby sacque with scalloped edges embroidered with white floss. There was a little bow of satin ribbon that had once been white, on the collar, but now it was of a yellow tint because of the number of long years it had lain in the trunk. The bit of a garment looked strange in the Major's big hands.

There was a string of round blue glass beads in the box, with a little gold clasp on it, and a heart-shaped gold locket about as large as a silver quarter of a dollar. Opening the locket with the edge of one of his great thumb nails,

the Major looked down on a little circle of silky yellow hair in one side of the locket, and then at a circle of dark brown hair that filled the other half. There were several things in the box, and the Major lifted them one by one, — a little tin rattle, slightly rusty, with a whistle in the handle, some soft white baby socks, and a pair of tiny blue kid slippers with little blue silk rosettes and steel buckles on them.

"I remember jess as well the day I bought them slippers for Ruthie," the Major said to himself, as he set the pair on his broad calloused palm. "I remember jess how tickled her ma was, an' jess how Ruthie held out her little paw fer 'em an' went 'goo goo' when I showed 'em to her. Her ma said I was extravagant to go an' pay a dollar an' a quarter fer them slippers when I didn't have but five dollars in the world; but I ain't ever been sorry I bought 'em, an' ten times five dollars wouldn't buy 'em of me now" —

"Say there!"

The Major hastily dropped the slippers and the other things in the box, and replaced the cover before he turned toward the door; then he asked, "What's wantin'?"

"I want you!"

The Major twisted himself half-way around toward the open door. He saw a little girl, dimly revealed by the firelight. She stood on the stone slab below the doorstep, her hand on the door-frame. She had a shawl over her

head, pinned under her chin. Below the shawl a tangle of jet-black hair fell almost to a pair of shining black eyes. Her face was thin and of that reddish brown which is brought by exposure to sun and wind. She wore a faded blue-and-white calico dress, and shoes, as he saw later, but no stockings.

"Come in!" said the Major.

The girl shook her head. "No, I can't. I want you to come and go to pa."

"Go to your pa — where is your pa?"

"Up the trail here a little piece," said the girl, starting away. "He's sick and he can't come no farther down without help."

The Major got up and went to the door, and said in the kindly tone in which he always spoke to children, "Now you wait a little, sissy, and let me understand more about this."

"There ain't anything to tell, much," said the girl impatiently. "We started to walk from Camp Gothic over to Silver Queen this morning, and pa give out back here on the trail a little ways. He ain't been well all the fall, and he's awful sick now, and oh, please come!"

The little girl's voice trailed away into a sob.

"I'll go right along with you, child," said the Major, reaching for his hat. "I reckon mebbe your pa ain't so sick as you think he is. Like as not he isn't, so you chirk up."

IV.

MARCIA'S PA.

CLOUDS had risen with the wind, and it was now so dark that the Major lighted a tin lantern with glass sides before he started out with the little girl. When they had gone a short way from the cabin he asked her name.

"Marcia," she said.

"Marshy, hey? It's a right purty name. And what's your other name?"

"Ruth."

The Major had taken her by the hand, and his clasp tightened as he heard her second name.

"Ruth?" he said. "That's an even purtier name than Marshy. If you was my little gal I'd call you Ruthie."

"That is what my mother used to call me," she said.

"An' why don't she keep on callin' you Ruthie?" asked the Major.

"She's dead."

The Major stooped suddenly, and took the little girl up in his arms.

"I guess mebbe I'd better carry you, sissy,"

he said. "The trail isn't very wide from here on, and I'm afraid you might fall if you tried to walk in front of me or behind me. It's rough, and it's dark now."

He crooked his long left arm and made a seat, and settled her securely.

"Now," he said, "you put yer arm around my neck, then we can go easy. There! That's right. Arn't you too heavy for me to carry? You ain't no heavier than so many pounds of feathers! I could carry three little girls like you."

"You must be awful strong," said the little girl.

"Oh, I am! I'm a reg'lar giant; but I ain't one o' the kind that eats up little folkses. So your name is Marshy Ruth, hey? An' what is your last name?"

"My last name is Field."

"Field, hey? I knew a fam'ly of that name back in old Missoury. You got kinfolks back there?"

"I hav'n't got any kinfolks any place — — just pa."

"No gran'mammy nor gran'daddy?"

"No," said little Marcia Ruth.

"Well, you *are* mighty bad off fer kinfolks!" said the Major. "Ev'ry little gal ort to have at least one gran'mammy an' gran'daddy — that is if they are of the right sort that lets a little girl do just about as she pleases. If I had a little gran'daughter of about your heft I

reckon she could lead me around and make me play with her about as she had a mind to. What's yer pa goin' to Silver Queen for?"

"I don't know. Pa's nearly always going to some place."

"An' he's goin' to Silver Queen jess to be a-goin, hey? You tell him there aint nothin' for him or any other man to go to Silver Queen for. Silver Queen's had its little day. Folks are gittin' away from there instid of goin' there. It certainly isn't no place for a sick man to go."

They climbed on up the trail in silence for a few minutes; and then the little girl said, "It isn't but a few steps farther. I remember I passed this awful big bowlder just after I left pa. Pa!" she called out shrilly. "Pa! I'm coming, pa, and a big kind man is coming!"

The Major laughed. "How do you know I'm kind?"

"You wouldn't be carrying me all this way up hill, if you wasn't," the child said, after stopping to think about it.

"Oh, as for that now," said the Major, "I couldn't help being kind to any little gal named Ruth, because I once had a little — hark!" Then he stopped to listen.

"That's pa groaning," said Marcia. "He's just around this curve. Coming, pa!"

A moment later Marcia Ruth was standing down on the ground and the Major was on his knees and holding the lantern above the form

of a man who had fallen in the trail in a position which showed he must have been too weak to go one step farther. He made no reply when the Major shook him gently, and said, "Hello, here, man? What's the matter? What's the matter?"

The Major got up and swung his lantern over the scene.

An old satchel, a blanket or two, and a few tin cooking utensils rusty and smoke-begrimed, lay by the side of the man. The Major, after trying in vain to arouse him, spoke to the silent little girl.

"Well, Marshy, you'll have to walk back to my cabin, for this time I must carry your pa. You must walk on ahead and carry the lantern."

The sick man evidently was not very tall, and he was very slight. The Major had calculated his weight. "He don't weigh above a hundred an' ten pounds, if he does that. I can trot down to the cabin with him nearly as easy as I carried the little gal up here."

After pulling the sick man to a sitting position, the Major spoke again to Marcia.

"We'll just pile your things up here, Sissy, side o' the trail an' leave 'em here until daylight, 'an then I'll come for 'em. No one will touch 'em in the night; scramble them together the best you can."

Marcia did as she was bidden. Then the Major drew the sick man up to a standing

position, put his strong arms around his waist and lifted him from the ground, Marcia holding the lantern aloft. When she saw her father up in the Major's arms, she said again, "You must be awful strong!"

"I'm a giant, as I told you; now I am goin' to lug your pa off to my castle. You trot on ahead an' light the way. Stiddy, my friend, stiddy."

The sick man had begun to twist about a little, and once he tried to speak. "What's the — the — matter here?"

"That's what I'd like to know," said the Major; and then he added to himself, quite to himself, "If all signs don't fail there's so much the matter that Marshy Ruth won't have no kin at all in this world in a mighty short time."

V.

EVENING JOURNEYS.

THE fire was still bright on the hearth when Marcia and the Major reached the open door of the cabin. The sick man had not spoken again, nor did he speak when the Major carried him in and laid him slowly down on the lounge in the firelight. The Major tried such restoratives as he had at hand, but they had no effect. Then he spoke to the little girl.

"Are you afraid to stay here alone while I go down to Silver Queen for the doctor? There's one doctor there yet."

"No, I'm not," said Marcia. "There isn't anything to be afraid of in a nice, snug, strong cabin like this. I like your house."

"Sure enough, Marshy, there isn't! I've lived in it, safe and sound, sixteen years."

"All I'm ever afraid of is bears and catty-mounts," said Marcia, "and I guess they wouldn't break in here with the door shut."

"Marshy, they never once have tried to get in in all these years," the Major assured her. "You treat them perlitely an' they'll treat you perlitely. You stay in your place, and they'll

stay in theirs. Of course if you was to go out an' go to chasin' 'em around an' foolin' with 'em they might turn on you, speshly if they had their little baby bears or cattymounts near by. But you needn't feel one mite afraid of 'em long as you stay here perlitely in the cabin, and don't go to the door and call 'em names! You jest sit quiet and look after yer sick pa."

The Major took up the lantern and departed. He had gone but a few yards from the door when he turned and hurried back toward the house.

"I don't reckon that child has had a mite o' supper," said he.

He hurriedly entered the cabin, really frightening little Marcia Ruth by his unexpected return.

"I come back to see if you had had any supper. Have you?"

"No," she said. "Pa was so sick we didn't stop. I wanted to get to Silver Queen before dark."

Little Marcia Ruth did not tell the Major that there was nothing to eat in the old satchel but a few hard crackers and a very small piece of bacon.

"Hungry, then, ain't you?" asked the Major.

"Yes, sir," replied Marcia frankly.

The Major stepped to the combination of cupboard and pantry he had "rigged up" in a corner of the cabin, threw open the door, and called her there.

"Help yourself to anything you can find," he said; "here's tea and coffee, and canned stuff of all sorts, and sardines and dried beef, and honey in the comb, an' butter an' cold slapjacks an' sody biskits an' gingersnaps an' a lot of other truck. You jess help yourself."

Marcia looked hungrily toward the cupboard, but seemed to wait for him to go.

"Eat hearty, now," the Major admonished her, lantern in hand, at the door. "There's a can-opener in that table drawer. Jess rip open a can of anything you want. I'll see if I can find anything else down to the store. If yer pa wakes up, jess give him his ch'ice of anything there is."

But when the Major was on his way down to the gulch he said to himself, "I guess her pa won't bother her none about anything to eat while I'm gone. He's going to have the doctor all the same. But I'll miss my guess if her pa ever eats anything more."

The Major did not "miss his guess;" for when the doctor reached Cloud Haven an hour or more later he shook his head and said to the Major, "I doubt if he is here when daylight comes."

"That's just the way I figgered it," said the Major. "Poor little gal!"

He nodded his head toward Marcia as he spoke. The Major and the doctor had found her sound asleep on the big fur rug before the fire, overcome by sleepiness and exhaustion.

He picked her up tenderly; and when she half-awoke and said she would go "look after pa," the Major said soothingly, "There, there, child! The doctor and I'll look after pa. You just take your little evenin' journey off to Dreamland, and you stay there until the sun comes peepin' in at yer winder."

He carried her into the second little room, and laid her down on his soft, snug bunk, half singing and half speaking over her the words of the old nursery song he had sung to his little Ruthie in bygone days:

"'Tis I who watch this baby from morn till eventide,
The trouble and the watching I will never lay aside."

The Major carefully removed the worn, dust covered shoes from Marcia's feet, loosened her dress, and covered her with a pair of blankets, then stooped and just touched his bearded lips to her childish forehead.

"Poor little youngster! Poor little Marshy Ruth! You jess sleep calm. You ain't friendless if you air motherless an' so nigh fatherless an' without any kin in the world! You jess sleep calm!"

When Marcia came back from Dreamland her father had gone on an evening journey to the "far country."

VI.

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE.

It was four days afterward. Marcia and the Major were sitting at the breakfast table, drawn up before one of the little flowery windows in the Major's cabin. The white curtain had been pushed back, and the sunshine came in cheerily over the tops of the geraniums. The Major usually ate his breakfast without spreading any cloth on the little pine table, but since Marcia had come to the cabin he had put one of the old Missouri table-cloths on at every meal. This morning he had gone even further; for he had taken one of the smaller pots of geranium, and set it exactly in the center of the table. He called Marcia's attention to it as they sat down.

"You notice them buds on that plant?" he asked. "They'll be bustin' out in full blossom before three days. That one is a pink one. You like flowers?"

"Yes, I do. Ma always had lots of flowers in our yard when we lived back in Ohio. I had a little flower-garden of my own, outdoors."

"Did, hey? What kind o' posies did you have in it?"

"Marigolds and phlox and four-o-clocks and Black-eyed Susan," said Marcia.

"Black-eyed Susan? That was a big yaller flower with a velvety black eye, wa'n't it?"

"Yes, it was."

"I remember it. My wife had it in *her* posey bed back in old Missoury. Me an' her both liked flowers. I reckon our little Ruthie would of liked 'em if she'd lived. So you come from back in Ohio?"

The Major had not questioned little Marcia much regarding her former home. She had been too full of grief after the death of her father to talk about anything, and the Major had done nothing but soothe and comfort her. But now he wanted to find out about her family and friends so that he could decide on what it was best to do in regard to her future.

"Yes, we came from back in Ohio," said Marcia.

"And you ain't got any folks back there?"

Marcia shook her head.

"I know you told me that night that you didn't have any gran'daddy nor gran'mammy," said the Major; "but ain't you got any auntses nor uncles nor cousins nor kin of any living kind?"

"No, pa didn't have any brothers or sisters, and ma didn't."

"How long have you been out here in this country — do you know, Marshy?"

Marcia knew. "Most five years. We never lived long anywheres. Ma used to say pa was a rolling stone, an' she was a rolling stone, and I was a little stone of the same kind."

"You all jess moved from place to place without no rhyme or reason in it, hey?" said the Major.

"Pa *always* kept moving when we were back in Ohio," answered little Marcia, with a hopeless sort of dreariness in her tone. "I guess ma and I and he have lived in a dozen places in the mountains. Pa seemed as if he wanted to be, and *must* be, on the go all the time."

"An' when them kind of men get the minin' fever they move more than before," said the Major. "Well, you've moved about so much already, Marshy, mebbe you'd jess like to stay here with me and rest a spell. Wouldn't it rest you, Marshy?"

"It's very nice here," replied the little girl, to whom good food in abundance, a snug and comfortable bed in which to sleep, cleanliness and order, were things to which she had never been used. She had never in all her life had a home so clean and comfortable as that in which she now found herself.

The Major spoke again, after a moment.

"You see, I *need* a little gal of about your size very much. I'm not nigh as young as I

was thirty years ago, an' I'm not nigh as spry. I think it would be real good to have a nimble-footed little gal to take steps for me, an' help me wash dishes an' keep things trim an' slick. I'm great on havin' things slick. I jess natchrell, hate dirt, an' disorder makes me straight oncomfortable. You an' me together could jess make old Cloud Haven shine, now couldn't we?"

Marcia smiled and nodded her head. "I guess we jess could," she said.

"Of course we can," said the Major. "Winter is mighty close at hand, an' if all signs don't fail it'll be a long one an' cold one; but we two can be as snug as a bug in a rug up here. You and I'll go down to Denver before it sets in in dead earnest, an' lay in all kinds of winter provender, an' then we'll come back here and be as cosy as a couple o' little chippy squirrels with a bushel o' nuts to feed on. To be sure, we'll have to be contented with each other's society most o' the time, as there may be weeks together when we won't see any one *but* ourselves. The snow will be too deep an' drifted for us to even go down to Silver Queen to the oppery or the theater or to any of the grand doin's they'll be havin' there this winter."

The Major laughed at his own foolish wit; and Marcia laughed too, but as if it were great fun. He got up and looked out of one of the little bright windows, down toward the forlorn mining-camp in the gulch below.

"Wonder if there's any little gals likely to winter there!" he said gently. "Not many men with little folkses are willin' to bring 'em to such a place as that, an' that is where they show their good sense. A minin'-camp like that ain't no place for children. If I had forty little gals an' boys — an' I wish I had jess that many — I wouldn't choose a minin'-camp in which to rare up any of 'em. If you get to be my little gal in dead earnest, Marshy, I sha'n't keep you here at Cloud Haven either. I'll be selfish enough to keep you here this winter, but another winter I'll have to see about bein' at some place where you can go to school. Mustn't grow up ign'rant, you know. Ever been to school?"

"Some," said Marcia.

"Read an' write, hey?"

"I can read pretty good, but I can't write pretty good. I can write *some*, and I've been on through long division in arithmetic, and I know the capitals of the States in the geography, and which is the longest river and the highest mountain in the world."

"You don't say! Some little gals of your age don't know that much. You're most ready for a diplomy. Still, your eddication ain't quite complete. There's several more things you *ought* to know. Can't say the multiplication back'ards, can you?"

Marcia shook her head.

"Marshy," said the Major, "when I went to

school no young person was thought to be well educated until she could spell clear through McGuffy's speller, an' say the multiplication table back'ards, an' now they make 'em know still more. Education is a good thing, an' you must stop a-strollin' and get some of it. Well, I got to go down to Silver Queen an' mail a letter before the weekly stage goes out. I don't suppose the weekly stage will make many more trips this fall, an' I'll have to trail 'way over to Pine Point to get mail. You can wash up the dishes while I'm gone, can't you?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Major, I can, jess!"

"Well, so do. Little girls ought to learn being useful. Ain't afraid to stay alone here couple o' hours?"

"I was always a-staying alone," said Marcia. "When we lived over in Silver Creek before we came to Camp Gothic, father used to go out prospecting, and mother used to go down to the town to work by the day, and I would stay alone from morning until night up in our cabin; and it was a quarter of a mile from any other cabin, and I *never* was afraid."

"Then I reckon you can stay all right here while I am gone. I'll leave you old Don for comp'ny. Come out here, Don!"

Don was the Major's big Saint Bernard dog. He was a huge fellow, although, not much beyond his puppyhood. The Major had bought him of a dog fancier when on his last trip to Denver. Don came forward, and the Major

made him lie down before the fire. Then he said slowly and forcibly, shaking his finger, "Now you jist stay right here an' take care of the cabin an' Marshy — speshly Marshy."

The Major nodded his head toward Marcia as he spoke, and Don looked at her some minutes with his big brown eyes. "You do anything Marshy says fer you to," the Major went on. "You got to obey her same as if she was me, jess the same. She's the lady o' the house, Don!"

Don beat the cabin floor slowly with his big bushy tail. He had seen Marcia for four days; but he had lain under the table mostly, and strange people had been coming and going. The little girl had taken no notice of him, and the Major hadn't taken much either. Don had understood perfectly that it was no time for dogs. This was the first cheerful day. And at the earliest moment when he properly could, his master had introduced him. Don was satisfied. He intended to take care of everything and everybody, of course, but "speshly Marshy."

VII.

THE MAJOR'S "PIECE OF POETRY."

AFTER the Major had disappeared down the trail, the "lady of the house" tied one of her mother's big blue-and-white gingham kitchen aprons around her neck and went to work on the breakfast dishes. She had resolved to "do" the dishes and to "slick up" the cabin in a way that should meet with the Major's approval when he returned from Silver Queen.

There was plenty of hot water on the little sheet-iron stove, and a bar of yellow soap in a dish in the little sink the Major had built in a corner of the cabin. Here Marcia washed and wiped the dishes, the frying-pan in which the bacon had been fried, the pan in which the biscuits had been baked, and the small tin coffee-pot. She felt almost cheerful once more, as she took the broom and swept the cabin floor until not the tiniest bit of litter or dirt could be found on it. Then she carried the pots of geranium to the sink, and gave them a bath that left their pretty leaves wet and shining. She brushed up the hearth, asking Don to move as politely as possible, which he did like a gentle-

man, and then found a clean white cloth, and wiped off the little dust on the windows.

When the Major came home he found Marcia, fresh and tidy, sewing a button on one of his blue flannel shirts.

"Well, well!" exclaimed he. "My! how slicked up ev'rything is! You didn't squash your bump of order while you was livin' like a gypsy, anyhow! Didn't have any callers that Don disapproved, hey?"

"No, Mr. Major, Don has been asleep all the while you've been gone."

At this remark Don opened his big eyes full on the Major, and winked if ever a dog winked.

"I didn't reckon you would have. It's doubtful if we have any such before next spring. This mountain ain't no place for a tramp to be trampin' round on in the winter time. Well, folks air still a-clearin' out o' Silver Queen. Looks now as if they'd all be gone by — say by November first. I reckon that — but here's something I bought if you'd done your work well, a kind of a 'fer-a-good-child reward o' merit.'"

The Major tossed Marcia a small white paper parcel which proved to contain a dozen sticks of bright-colored candy.

"The very last bit o' candy they had in the only store down in Silver Queen!" said the Major. "Hank Dobbs, the storekeeper, is packin' up to clear out to-morrow. The town an' the hull gulch will have to git along with-

out his grand dry-goods-and-gin'ral-merchandise emporium after now, for he's packed most of it in a truuk an' a carpet bag. To be shore they've got half a dozen cans o' tomaters, five or six clay pipes, an' a few packages o' smokin' terbacker left at the Grand Arcade store, where I got the last of their candy; but Johnson an' Hawkins, the firm that runs it, are going to pull out this week, so there won't be no more chance a-tall to go shoppin' down in Silver Queen. Little Marshy Ruth, what do you say to us takin' a boarder?"

Little Marcia Ruth looked up from her sewing with a smile, but she did not say anything.

"Of course," continued the Major, "we ain't goin' to open a hotel nor even any genteel boardin'-house, but we must be some accommodatin'. The older I grow, Marshy, the clearer I see that it is good and wise to be obligin' in this life, an' that the more favors you do, speshly favors that makes other folkses happy, the more happiness an' fun you'll get yourself! Don't you ever lose the chance to do a favor, little Marshy, if you want to be happy. I'm an old man now; an' the thing that gives me the most satisfaction is thinkin' o' the good I've tried to do, an' the favors that have cost me the most are the ones I like to think of best. Ain't nothin', nothin', little Marshy Ruth, that pays so well as jess simple human kindness. I ain't never run much to poetry in my readin'; but sometimes I come acrost something in rhyme

that tells the truth in a purtier way than it could be told any other way, and when I come across anything o' that kind I cut it out an' keep it 'round with me to read now an' then. Here's the last little thing o' that kind I cut out. I think that it'd be a good thing for you to learn it by heart, an' speak it sometime when you git to speakin' pieces at school. Spose you can read well enough to read that right along?"

The Major handed Marcia a worn little newspaper clipping that he had taken from his pocketbook. He had had it ten years. Not oftener than once in ten years did he find anything that he "jess really liked."

Marcia took it, and read aloud without having to pause at any of the words:

"If any little word of ours
Can make one life the brighter,
If any little song of ours
Can make one heart the lighter,
God help us speak that little word,
And take our bit of singing
And drop it in some lonely vale,
To set the echoes ringing."

"Good enough!" exclaimed the Major. "Got more book l'arnin' than I reckoned on! Go on an' read the next verse. It's even better than the first."

Marcia read it, "right along."

"If any little love of ours
Can make one life the sweeter,
If any little care of ours
Can make one step the fleeter,

If any little help may ease
The burden of another,
God give us love and care and strength
To help along each other."

"Fine!" almost shouted the Major. "Mebbe I ain't no jedge, but I call that good poetry, an' the readin' of that little screed over an' over has often led me to look around an' see if there was any one I could help along. When I got a chance to kind o' 'help some one along' down in poor old dyin' Silver Queen to-day, I jess thought o' them two lines:

'God give us love an' care an' strength
To help along each other.'

An' when I was asked to help a poor chap out, I said I'd do it. I thought afterward that mebbe I'd better have consulted the lady of the house — but I'm doin' it now, little Marshy."

VIII.

A BOARDER AT CLOUD HAVEN.

"Now it was jess this way," said the Major when he had carefully restored the scrap of paper to his pocket. "I'd mailed my letter an' had wasted some little time a-talkin' around at the stores, an' I was about to come back home when who should I bump up against but big Jed Thorpe, a feller I used to know over in Stray Horse Gulch. Seems he's been workin' on a claim over on Windy Mountain, four miles from here, all summer. The claim hadn't panned out anything, an' life had gone wrong with Jed all around; but the worst was that Jed's wife had died, an' left him with a little gal 'bout your age, Marshy."

"Oh!" said Marcia, in a voice full of sympathy.

"Yes, Marshy; and the little gal's some like you in not having any brothers or sisters. Then, again, she is not like you; for I jedge from her looks, an' a few of her actions in the little time I saw her, that she's a kind of a harum-scarum with a tongue loose at both ends, whereas, the land knows, *you* are quiet enough to suit

even the folkses that say children should be seen and not heard, — a doctrine I never thought well of. Doris Thorpe don't think much of it either, I'll be bound! I've an idee that she'll make things kind o' lively here at Cloud Haven — but mebbe we need jest what she'll bring, little Marshy Ruth."

Little Marcia Ruth nodded her head obediently.

"You see, her father wants to go away over to Eagle Cliff about a claim he has there, an' he don't want to trail Doris along. He s'posed he could leave her at the boardin'-house down in Silver Queen while he was gone; but the boardin'-house has shut up, an' there ain't another single place where the child can stay while her pa's gone. He lots on takin' her out o' the gulch an' over to Crystal City for the winter when he gets back from Eagle Cliff; an' when I told him about you bein' up here he asked if I wouldn't take his little Doris in too, as a kind of a boarder for the time being; an' I said I would, but when any one ketches me takin' pay for a little gal's board it'll be when I'm a sight meaner than I am now! Say, what do you think of havin' a little gal about your size here awhile?"

"I'll like it," said Marcia.

"Better wait until you see her before you are so sure! The chances are you won't take to her at all. She isn't a bit like you."

"Perhaps I'll like her all the better for that," said Marcia sweetly.

"Quite possible," said the Major. "It would make it kind o' dull if we had to 'sociate all the time with folkses jess like ourselves, now that's a fact. It is a good deal more interestin' to come into contact with folks that's straight different. An' you'll find this Doris Thorpe to be considerable diff'rent. Anyhow, there ain't so many little gals in this neighborhood that we kin afford to be fussy an' pick an' choose!"

"When is Doris coming?" asked Marcia.

"This very afternoon. Her pa's goin' to come with her, an' you'd better fly around an' git a sweet o' rooms ready. Shell she have the pink sweet or the blue sweet, or the state sweet with its private bawth an' dinin-'room?"

The Major threw his head back and laughed loudly at his own fun. Marcia laughed with him — although she did not fully understand all that he was talking about. But it was good to hear the Major laugh; for it was a hearty, ringing, merry laugh — one of the kind that brings smiles to the faces of all who hear it.

"An' you must speak to the head cook, Marshy, an' tell him that we are to have a lady guest for a few days, an' then you'd better step to the telephone an' order extrys up from the market. How would oysters on the half-shell do to begin with? Then we might have some sweetbreads and truffles and sich 'to follow the oysters. You think that would be about right, my little lady of the house?"

"You know I don't know, Mr. Major," said Marcia, a little soberly. "We never had company in our lives."

"Well, we'll wait until she comes, an' then we'll sound her on what she wants to eat," said the Major, dropping his fun. "From what I have seen of her I don't think she'll be a mite back'ard about tellin' what she wants. It wouldn't s'prise me any if she looked the larder over within five minutes after she got here! But we'll turn in now and get our own dinner before she comes."

IX.

DORIS.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when the Major, who had stood looking down the trail leading to Silver Queen for some time, turned to Marcia.

"They're comin'. I kin see them jess roundin' the curve down there by that big split bowlder. Where's the porter? He wants to be ready to go out an' meet them an' bring in their baggage!"

Marcia laughed a little, feeling a queer excitement, for she never had lived in a house with another little girl, and came and stood by the Major in the doorway. He lifted her up into his strong arms.

"See em' comin' just this side o' that big rock down the trail?"

"Oh! I see them now!"

"Wouldn't it be a kind of a friendly an' sociable thing for us to walk out an' meet 'em?" asked the Major. "You want to go?"

Marcia slipped down, and got her worn old hat from a peg on the cabin wall and her jacket too.

They set forth hand in hand, after telling

Don to stay at home. A walk of five minutes brought them face to face with big Jed Thorpe and Doris.

"Hello!" called out the Major cheerily, when they were yet some distance from their guests.

"Hello your own self!" came in shrill, ringing tones; and then Marcia and the Major saw Jed give Doris a jerk of reproof.

"A polite little girl, eh!" said the Major in an undertone.

"You said 'Hello!' to her, Mr. Major," said little Marcia Ruth, also in undertones, but with a voice of justice.

A moment or two later Marcia stood looking into the twinkling blue eyes of a little girl of about her own age. This little girl had hair of a decidedly reddish tinge, and the Major did not exceed the truth when he said that her nose was "as freckled as a turkey egg." She had sharp front teeth and a sharp little chin. When she smiled a pair of dimples came to her cheeks, and her laugh was equal to the Major's in its cheeriness and heartiness. She held herself very erect, and looked at Marcia and the Major with no trace of shyness.

"Hello, girl!" she said to Marcia. "Where did you come from here?"

"From over in Camp Gothic."

"Dead old place! Dead as Silver Queen down there. Is it any livelier up where you and the Major live?"

The Major laughed aloud at this.

"Oh! it's so gay up at Cloud Haven, where we live, that Marshy and I are all wore out with the gayety of it."

"It looks lively up there, I must say," said Doris, glancing up toward the cabin sitting on the rocky shelf of Old Baldy.

"Oh, it is. Don't you hear the bands playing, an' all the noise an' racket of the people havin' a good time? An' it will be a good deal livelier when you get there."

"I reckon it will," said Jed Thorpe dryly.

This prediction was verified; for the nimble tongue of little Doris ran steadily, and her laugh rang out every few minutes. She walked a short distance back down the trail with her father on his return to Silver Queen. The Major said, when the two were beyond hearing, "Mighty lively youngster, an' yet she's real true likable, Marshy. She ain't had the best o' raisin', but I'll bet that she wouldn't do a mean thing or tell a fib. I take to her if she is a mite sassy. A body oughtn't to expect much manners from one raised as she's been. She's never been out o' sight o' these mountains. Born right here an' raised here. I told her pa to-day that it was his duty to get some place where she could go to school an' have some raisin'. She's a good-hearted child. I can tell that from her laugh. No mean kind of a person ever laughs as she laughs, nor they wouldn't look you right in the eye either. I kind o' take to her, yes I do!"

But Marcia was silent.

When Doris came back to the cabin, she at once entered and threw herself face downward on the bearskin rug before the hearth. With her chin in her hands, and partly supporting herself on her elbows, she gazed into the fire the Major had started in the fireplace.

"You got things mighty nice and comfortable here, Mr. Major-What's-Your-Name," she said at last, complacently. "You don't often find such a comfortable cabin. Did *you* shoot the bear this hide come from?"

"I did, Doris."

"Honest Injun?"

"Hope to die if I didn't!"

"Well, he must have been a whaling big fellow!"

"He was consid'rable hefty," said the Major.

"I should think so. Did he show much fight?"

"You'd thought so if you'd been there, Doris."

"Wish I had!"

"You'd of been skeered out of a year's growth," said the Major.

"Oh, would I? You ask my father if I was scared out of even a week's growth one day when he and I come across a fearfully big old grizzly over in Stray Horse Gulch. You ever see a real live bear, you Marcia girl?"

"Not running wild," answered Marcia.

"Well, it's much more fun to see them that

way than all chained up with a muzzle on," said Doris. "Talking of bears, I'm as hungry as one just out of his winter den. Most supper-time?"

"Very nearly. What will your ladyship have for supper?" asked the Major, doing most of the talking to protect Marcia in her shyness.

"The best you have!" laughed Doris, as she rolled over on her side with one cheek resting in the hollow of her hand. "You two get the supper and I'll wash the dishes. That's the way father and I fix it. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Yes, 'tis," said Marcia suddenly, pleased for the first time with what Doris said.

"I always want to do the fair thing," added Doris, as she took her thumb and finger and flipped back a live coal that had popped from the fireplace to the edge of the rug on which she was lying.

"I believe you do, sissy," said the Major.

"I just hate a sneak!" said Doris, "or a shirk! You see if I don't wash the dishes up spick and span — and I hate to wash dishes."

"S'posin' you get the supper then, an' we will do the dishes," said he teasingly.

"Oh, but I hate cooking worse than I hate washing dishes!" laughed Doris.

Then the blue eyes wandered around the room until they rested on the shining barrel of the Major's rifle.

"You love your gun, don't you, Mister Major?" she asked.

"What makes you think so?"

"Because you keep it so shiny. The very stock shines. Let's shoot at a mark in the morning."

"*You* shoot at a mark? I'll warrant you'd stick your fingers in your ears if you knew the gun was to go off."

"Would I? You hand me down that gun and see if I can't stand in the cabin door and chip a bit of the bark off that tree out across the trail!"

"I'll take your word for it, sissy," said the Major. "What else can you do that little gals ain't any bizness to do?"

"I can climb a pine tree that ain't a sign of a branch for twenty-five feet from the base up! Yes, and I can tumble and tousle this noble old dog of yours around any way I want to, and he won't bite me!"

Don was lying quietly at the other end of the bearskin, once in a while looking up at "the lady of the house" as she passed. Doris rolled over toward him, clasped her thin arms around his neck, and buried her face in his shaggy hair.

"You beautiful old doggy!" she said. "Anything I love it's a dog — a great big, lovely old doggy! Now, you big rascal, you!"

She rose to her knees and began to tumble and tousle the dog; and he entered fully into

the romp, barking loudly and playfully, and biting at her hands as she cuffed his ears and pommeled him with her small fists. Marcia looked on in wonder. The Major, frying batter-cakes, looked on too. "Well," said he to himself, "they make a real purty picture playing there in the firelight. Two little gals an' a dog do brighten up an old feller's cabin mightily. I don't believe I shall care if Jed Thorpe ain't in any hurry about comin' back to carry away that little tyke of his!"

X.

AN INTERESTING ADVERTISEMENT.

DORIS, true to her promise, "did up" the supper dishes "spick and span," when the evening meal was over. Marcia offered to help, but Doris spoke up to her with decision:

"No, you sha'n't. A bargain is a bargain. I said I was going to do these dishes myself if you got the supper, and I shall stick by my bargain."

"Good for you!" cried the Major approvingly. "Always stick to your word, my girl, no matter how hard 'tis!"

"I can't think of any harder way of doing it than by washing a pile of dirty dishes and a greasy old skillet," said Doris, as she poured a stream of scalding water over the three plates she had just washed.

Every night the Major piled pine-knots on the fire after darkness had settled around Cloud Haven. This evening the burning, crackling knots filled the room with a cheery light. The Major lay on the couch before the fire smoking his pipe, and listening to the chatter of Doris as she romped with the dog or made progress

in her efforts to "get acquainted" with Marcia. After a while she overcame something of Marcia's reserve. Then the two girls talked merrily; and it pleased the Major to hear Marcia's laugh ringing out almost as clearly as the laugh of Doris.

It was not yet nine o'clock when Doris suddenly began to yawn.

"I feel like turning in for the night," she said. "Where am I going to bunk, Mr. Major?"

"You and Marcia are going to bunk in there," said the Major pointing, to the room in the rear of the cabin. "Come, Marshy," said he, "you are the lady of the house, the Mrs. Hostess; you light a candle, an' show your guest to her apartment. Tell her that if she wishes anything in the night to ring for it, and be sure an' show her just where the fire-escape is. See to it that she puts out the gas, and ask her if she wishes to be called in the morning for any pertickler train."

Doris stared at the Major for a moment, and then she rushed forward, threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him.

"What a funny old Mr. Major you are!" she said as she ran away. "But I like you just the same."

His other little girl had never kissed him. But now she came up, the candle in her hand, and spoke to him shyly.

"Good-night Mr. Major," she said; and then she, too, kissed him, and followed Doris

into the next room, the Major calling out after them, "Good night, little tads! an' the Lord bless an' keep you both!"

Neither little girl noticed the sudden break in the Major's voice, and Marcia supposed the sudden coughing spell that seized him was caused by a whiff of smoke from his pipe going down his throat. Of course they didn't see the two big tear-drops that stole down his furrowed and bearded cheeks when they had gone into the next room, and had begun to whisper and giggle together as little girls will when they are getting ready for bed.

A quarter of an hour after it had become perfectly silent in the little bedroom, the Major, who was sitting before the fire with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, was startled by a loud "boo!" Whirling around he saw a little figure draped in a sheet with outstretched arms behind him. The figure ran toward the door of the room, but the Major caught her up in his arms, and held her aloft while she struggled and shrieked with laughter.

"What you mean by skeering me like that?" he asked in pretended anger. "I never was so skeered in all the born days of my life. If there's anything I *am* afeerd of it's spooks!" Then he carried Doris into the bedroom, and dropped her down into her bunk.

When the Major returned to his place before the fire, he took up the paper that he had brought from Silver Queen that morning. It

was a Denver paper; and as the Major ran his eye up and down the columns he chanced to come across this advertisement in the "Personal" column:

"If Myron Norton Field, who went from Leesville, Ohio, to Colorado, five or six years ago, will call on or communicate with the undersigned at 352 Larimer Street within the next ten days, he will hear of something very much to his advantage. J. B. UPTON."

After the Major had read this notice through three times, he let the paper slip from his hand to the floor. He began to "mull" over what he had read.

"Myron — Norton — Field," said the Major to himself. "That was his name. That was the name written on a little note-book in his pocket, an' Marcia said that it was her pa's own name. Yes, an' she certain said that the name of the place they lived in, in Ohio, before they came here, was Leesville. I'd like to know what this Upton feller knows that would of been to the advantage of Myron Norton Field. It can't advantage him any now, not if he has fallen heir to the United States Mint, pore feller! But, then, I trust he has fallen heir to something wuth a sight more than the United States Mint or anything else in the United States!"

The Major took up the paper, and read the notice for the fourth time. He looked at the date of the paper, and saw it was already five days old.

"There ain't but five more days in which to see or git word to this Upton man," he mused. "An' there ain't another mail out o' here for a week. Mails are mighty oncertain in the mountains at this time o' the year anyhow. It won't do to trust anything urgent or important to the mails. An' yit if this matter is something that would of been important to Myron Norton Field, mebbe it is of equal importance to his little gal. An' as I seem to be the only friend Marshy's got, it rests on me to look up anything that might be to her advantage!"

It was about midnight before the Major made up his mind what he would do in regard to the advertisement he had read.

"Well," he said to himself, as he roused up, "I'll quiz Marshy all I can to-morrow about her pa without saying a word about this notice, an' then I'll jess go down to Denver an' see this Mr. Upton man. I can walk over Paradise Pass an' get the tri-weekly stage at Gothic City, an' go on it down into the South Park an' git the train for Denver there. Marshy and I was going to Denver soon to lay in provisions anyhow, but I can't wait for that. I'll see to the provisions when there. If there's anything in Denver to the advantage of this little orphan gal she's going to know about it. But what about these two youngsters while I'm gone?" he went on. "They couldn't walk way over to Gothic City to git the stage, even if I wanted

to take 'em with me, leastwise Marshy couldn't. I reckon Doris could hoof it clean to Denver if she tuk a notion. She's that chock full o' grit. But they can't go. That's out o' the question. Jed Thorpe is six or eight miles on the way to his claim, for he was goin' that far this afternoon an' stay all night with some old chum on the road. An' if I want to git the next stage from Gothic City I must get out o' here by eight o'clock. Well, I can't figger it out any way but that the two little gals stay here alone while I'm gone. I'll leave 'em Don, of course. There's plenty o' grub to last three times as long as I'll be away, an' Marshy knows more about cookin' than some grown-up wimmen do."

The Major pondered the matter a little longer. Then he said to himself, "I really needn't worry none about leavin' them for five or six days. 'Tisn't likely a single person will come nigh the cabin in that time. They are both as well as a couple o' little pigs, an' I'll warrant you that neither of 'em will be a bit afraid."

The Major was right in this conjecture. Doris hooted at the idea of being afraid to stay in the nice cabin at Cloud Haven with Marcia for company.

"Why," she said, "once I was left alone in our cabin over in Stray Horse Gulch for a week, and I wasn't scared a little bit. Afraid to stay here? I wouldn't be afraid to stay all by my

lone self! It will just be a picnic for us, now won't it, Marcia?"

Marcia said she was not afraid to stay with Doris for company. So the Major said, "All right then. I'll be off in less than an hour."

XI.

A CALLER AT CLOUD HAVEN.

THE Major did not tell either of the little girls the real object of his visit to Denver. Marcia knew the need of his going there before winter set in to secure more provisions. He spoke of this to her, and said he thought he'd better go now, though it was earlier than he intended, because he had other "important business" there.

Before the Major went, he sat down before Don, took the dog's head between his knees and talked to him.

"Now see here, Don; I want you to look on yourself as master of the house while I am gone. I want you to see to it that no harm comes to the ladies of the house. You keep your eye on 'em, an' you defend 'em with your life. You stay around the cabin. Don't you go off once! When I come back I want to find you right here with my little Marshy and Doris!"

Don wagged his tail, and acted quite as if he understood. But he certainly did not accept the trust cheerfully. When the Major was

leaving the cabin the dog whined to go with him. After he was gone he stood before the door a long time, scratching it, and begging to be allowed to go out.

"But you are not going," said Doris, as she gave him a cuff on one of his big ears. "You just go and lie down and behave yourself. A nice master of the house you are, whining and fussing, and willing to leave the ladies alone! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Whether this rebuke made an impression on Don is not known. But he finally gave up trying to get out, and lay down before the fire and went to sleep, with his head between his forelegs. Doris said scornfully, "He's nothing but a half-trained puppy!"

Marcia washed the breakfast dishes, and Doris wiped them. Now that they had "got acquainted," as Doris said, they talked and laughed together incessantly, Marcia chattering almost as fast as the nimble-tongued Doris. It was a great excitement to her to be with another little girl!

They compared notes in regard to living in the mining gulches, and Doris was eager to know what the world was like beyond the mountain walls behind which she had always lived. She listened eagerly when Marcia told her of Ohio and about the great plains and broad rivers, and announced her intention of traveling all over the world if her father ever "struck it rich."

"But I guess I'll never go if I have to wait

for that," she added. "My daddy isn't one of the lucky kind."

When the dishes were washed and put away, and the cabin made tidy, Doris said, "I saw a checkerboard there on the shelf above the mantel last night. Do you know how to play checkers, Marcia?"

"Oh, yes; and I know how to play fox-and-geese too."

"So do I. Supposing we have a game or two."

Marcia agreed to this; and they put the checkerboard on the table in front of the window, and were soon intent on a game. They had won one each, and were putting their men in position for the third, when there came a sudden knock at the door. Marcia was so startled that she tipped all of her men out of the "king row." Doris went to the door, but instead of opening it she slipped the strong bolt that fastened it. Then she called out, "Who is it?"

Don roused up, and began barking furiously. Doris stamped her foot and said, "Silence, Don!"

Then she called out again, "Who are you?"

"Can I sell you some dings to-day?" was the reply.

"Oh, it's a pedler," said Doris in an undertone to Marcia. "He was down in Silver Queen yesterday. I suppose he is going over to Crystal City."

"You vant to buy someding to-day?"

"No, we do not."

"I sells all my dings very sheep."

"We don't want to buy."

"You vill not get a shanse no more dis vinter dings to buy. I have lofly reebon und peautiful lace."

"We can get through the winter with what we have on hand," said Doris, looking at Marcia and laughing.

The man rapped boldly on the door. "Come! Open de door! I know tere is no man inside."

"That makes no difference," replied Doris. "There is a big dog in here and a rifle, and I know to shoot, and the dog will bite."

"Pooh! You dink I am afraid?"

"Do you think that I am afraid?" questioned Doris.

"I yoost vant to show you vot I haf to sell, lady!"

"We don't want to see what you have to sell. Come here, Don! guard this door while I get the gun."

Don flew at the door, barking loudly. He clawed and scratched in his efforts to get out, when all at once Marcia, glancing out of the window, said in a tone of great relief, "The man has gone! There he goes up the trail!"

Both girls looked out of the window, and saw the pedler hurrying up the trail with his pack on his back.

"I guess that's the last we'll see of him," said

Doris. "You were scared, now weren't you, Marcia?"

"Yes, I was," said Marcia, confessing it; "just as scared as I could be."

"Well, I wasn't born in the woods to be scared of a screech-owl! Now let's finish our game of checkers."

They sat down at the table; but Marcia was still nervous, and she played so badly that Doris had an easy victory in winning the "rubber." Then the two girls looked over a little box of bright-colored scraps of dress goods that were among Marcia's few possessions, and got needles and some thread and began a penwiper for the Major.

"He has about as much need of a penwiper as he has for a package of hairpins," said Doris. "But then it might please him if we made him one, you know. Daddy says the Major is one of the best men in the world."

"He is awful good," said Marcia simply.

"He is white," replied Doris, which was the strongest testimony she knew how to bear to the Major's virtues.

The girls had a merry time cooking and eating their dinner. Still the day seemed very long; and when they had washed the dishes, and Doris went to the door to throw out the dishwater, she found that she had thrown out a spoon with it, and she stepped out for it, leaving the door open behind her; and Don, who had been lying before the fire half asleep, saw

the open door and suddenly became wide awake and shot out and flew down the trail as fast as his legs could carry him, heedless of the loud and imperative commands of Doris to return!

"He is off on the trail of the Major," said Doris, when she returned to the cabin, greatly vexed over Don's ungallant conduct.

"He can't overtake the Major now," said Marcia, much worried.

"He'll overtake him mighty soon if he keeps going as he was going when he went around that curve in the trail," said Doris.

Both girls secretly felt troubled over the escape of their best protector; even Doris thought nothing worse could have happened. They hoped that he would weary of his pursuit of his master and return to the cabin at nightfall. But he did not.

XII.

HOW DON RETURNED.

THE days wore on very slowly for the little girls at Cloud Haven. The weather was unusually sunny and warm for that time of the year, and they took several walks up the mountain slopes. One day they went down to the now entirely deserted Silver Queen. They found the doors of the cabins open and their former occupants gone.

"And I guess none of them went away as well off nor as light-hearted as when they came here," said Doris. "And none of them will ever come back! And here their homes will stand and stand, their doors blowing back and forth, until they rot down!"

"Poor men!" said Marcia. "I am sorry for them."

The little girls wandered up and down the one rocky, crooked street of the camp, peering into the empty cabins for some time, commenting on the loneliness of the place. Then they started to climb the trail leading to Cloud Haven. Marcia thought how cosey the home would seem with its furs and flowers and open fire, if only the good Major were back.

"It's almost as warm as June," said she. "I don't believe winter is coming very early this year, if the Major did think it was."

"Don't you be too sure," said Doris. "Just like as not there'll be a reg'lar blizzard raging and ranting around here before morning. Sometimes it doesn't take more than half a minute, you know, for the weather to change. I love a blizzard, don't you?"

Marcia gave a little shiver. "No, I do not. I feel dreadful when the wind roars so in the canons, and the snow drives, and it gets so dark! I would be sick if a blizzard came while dear Mr. Major is gone!"

The dazzling sun disappeared behind a cloud at that moment, and the air seemed to freeze up instantly. They stood still, looking at the mighty clouds that rose fast, like strange towers, up from behind Baldy Mountain.

"I've seen them come up that way before, all of a sudden, when the sun had been shining as bright," said Doris. "Marcia Field, there's going to be a big one before morning."

The "big one" came long before morning. The entire sky had become overcast, and the wind was beginning to rise, by the time the little girls entered Cloud Haven. All the afternoon the mountain peaks grew grimmer and colder. Night shut down suddenly. Marcia and Doris worked hard for an hour, bringing in a great quantity of firewood from the winter supply the Major had piled up in long rows

behind the cabin. Then they built up a roaring fire, and shut the door and bolted it, and drew the white curtains close behind the geraniums.

"I like a great, big, snapping fire on such a night," said Doris cheerily. "I shouldn't wonder if we sat up all night. Now, we want something nice and hot for supper. Let's open a can of the Major's tomatoes, and stew them up with lots of seasoning in them."

"And I will make some biscuits, and we will have them hot with ham gravy," said Marcia, always cheerful when she was cooking. "And let's set the table right up before the fireplace."

The agreeable odor of frying ham soon filled the little cabin, and the light from the burning logs shed a rosy glow all about, sending it even into the bedroom. Once Doris unbolted the door and looked out; but the wind swept in so fiercely that it blew ashes from the fireplace over the room, and she closed it quickly.

"It's as dark as a stack of black cats," she said. "And how the wind is roaring up and down the canon! It's beginning to snow too."

"And how cold it has grown!" said Marcia, as she laid another log on the fire. "I guess we needn't be afraid of pedlers nor of any one else coming snooping around such a night as this!"

When their supper was ready, the little girls sat close to the fire and ate. The darkness and

storm did not depress Doris in the least. She chattered away, and her merry laugh rang out again and again. She had a great sense of snugness and comfort, sitting there in the warm soft glow of the firelight while the wind roared and the snow flew outside. "Isn't this just cosey?" she said to Marcia, as they sat at the little table with its coarse but clean white cloth. "Let's eat real slow and enjoy it! Your biscuits are as light as a feather, Marcia. I never can get biscuits to be light and flaky."

"Well, you fried the ham just right," said Marcia, by way of returning Doris's compliment. "And I didn't suppose that any one could make such good cocoa with just condensed milk! I think — what's that?"

"I don't hear anything," said Doris.

"It sounded like something right on the door. Hark! Was that a whine, or was it the wind blowing?" Little Marcia thought of "cattymounts."

Both stopped eating, and listened.

"There it is again!" said Marcia.

"We'll see what it is," said Doris, jumping up from the table and starting to go to the door.

"O mercy! don't open the door!" exclaimed Marcia. "It may be a bear!"

Doris put her ear to the keyhole for a moment. Then she rapped on the door with her knuckles, whereupon the scratching was repeated, and it was followed by a low whine.

"That isn't any bear," said Doris as she threw back the bolt. "It is a dog."

Doris opened the door, and Don came bounding into the room bearing evidence of having traveled far. His shaggy coat had snowflakes frozen thick upon it, and his red tongue was lolling out of his mouth.

"Oh, the Major must be coming!" exclaimed Marcia. "He must be near. He did not think be would get back until to-morrow, but he must have started a day sooner than he thought he would. Where's the Major, Don?"

The dog walked around and around the room, panting and whining. Then he ran to the door, and began scratching on it as if imploring to be let out again.

"I think he wants to run back to meet the Major," said Doris; and she opened the door and Don ran out.

The two little girls stood in the doorway, in the heavy wind and darkness and beating snow, expecting each moment to see the Major emerge into the expanse of light that spread a little way out. But he did not appear.

Suddenly Don came running back to them in the gloom and storm, and caught Marcia's skirt between his teeth, and pulled her down from the doorstep. She got away from him, and he ran off into the darkness again, then came back whining and this time caught at the skirt of Doris's dress, trying to pull her along after him.

Doris laid hold of his collar the best she could. "Marcia," she said, "Don wants us to go with him to meet the Major! That is just what he means by these actions!"

She bent over and patted the great puppy on the head. "Do you want us to go with you and meet the Major, Don?"

The dog barked frantically.

"That is just what he wants. Let's go, Marcia."

"It's awfully dark, Doris. We shall get lost, and fall down, and everything."

"We can take the Major's lantern. You know he got it all ready for use before he went away so that we could have it if we needed it. And we sha'n't get lost — Don will keep coming back to us if we don't keep up with him."

Don made a great noise in his impatience and his gladness all the while the little girls were lighting the lantern and bundling themselves up.

All at once, Doris stopped and screamed.

"Marcia Field! I just believe the dear, dear, Major is in trouble of some sort! He would have been here with Don by this time if everything was right! I think Don is so wild to have us go with him because the Major has sent him for us! I do! There's something wrong! I know there is! Bundle up good. There's no telling how far we will have to go! Isn't there a bottle of brandy up there on the top shelf of the cupboard?"

"I guess so."

"I thought I saw it one day when I was mousing around in the cupboard. We'd better take it with us."

Doris went into the bedroom just before they started, and came out with a pair of heavy gray blankets. She handed one of them to Marcia.

"Here, we'd better each of us wrap a blanket around us over our other things — it's deadly cold." Little Doris didn't say the Major might need the warmth of the blankets when they found him.

The little girls partly deadened the fire by throwing ashes over it, and then started out with Don, who now ran on ahead barking, and then would return and rub up against them as if to thank them for coming with him.

XIII.

FOR THE MAJOR.

DOWN the trail, and down the trail, went Marcia and Doris in the storm, following the frozen-coated dog. It was so intensely dark they could not see a foot beyond the light cast by the old tin lantern which Doris carried.

The wind went roaring and wailing up and down the black canon below. It almost swept the two little girls from the trail on some of the curves, and the snow dashing in their faces was hard and fine and sharp like meal. Their blankets flapped round them; and one blast of icy wind, fiercer and suddener than the others, blew Marcia's up over her head so that she stumbled and fell, bruising herself. Doris helped her up.

"Have you hurt you, Marcia?"

"I guess not," said Marcia, steadying herself, and getting her blanket down around her again.

"This isn't as much fun as sitting by the fire in the cabin toasting our toes, is it, Marcia?" said Doris.

"No, it isn't — where's Don?"

"He's just ahead; you scared?"

"No — not so very much — are you?"

"Not a bit! I never was afraid of the dark yet, or a storm, but I wouldn't choose this kind of a night to go walking, though. We must both be careful not to smash the lantern or we'll be in a nice fix. I hope Don isn't leading us off on a wild-goose chase!"

Down and down they went, until at last they stopped still, to take counsel together. They concluded they better go back to the cabin, and turned. Don, out of sight in the darkness, seemed to discover it instantly. He set up such a barking, and came back and tugged so hard at their clothes, that they followed after him again.

The Major must be on ahead somewhere," Doris said. "We'll go a little farther, anyway."

The two little girls were down the trail now a distance of fully two miles from Cloud Haven.

Don plunged on ahead, a long time silent; then suddenly they heard him barking furiously in the darkness. Five minutes later they both almost fell over a man, lying straight across the trail. Doris righted herself, and held the lantern aloft. There was Don, his front paws on the prostrate form, and looking up at her. The man was certainly the Major; and a great rock, that must have come rolling down the mountain was holding him fast by one leg.

"It's the Major sure enough!" gasped Doris.

"Major! Major! here we be, Doris and Marcia, come to help you! Can't you speak to us?"

But the Major had fainted.

"Put the brandy to his lips," whispered Marcia, trembling, and getting the flask from her pocket.

In a moment or so the Major opened his eyes full upon them.

"Children, how did you get here?"

"On shank's horses," replied Doris merrily, though she was trembling, too, as bad as Marcia. "Don came and told us, and here we are."

The Major drew a long, hard breath. "You can't get this rock off my leg, can you?"

"We'll try."

And try his little girls did, but in vain. The rock was too heavy for them to move, yet they tried again and again.

They were within half a mile of deserted Silver Queen now. As they stood erect, getting their breath for another effort, suddenly Doris cried out:

"See, Marcia! There's a light in one of the cabins down in Silver Queen! I can see it every now and then in the storm! Look!"

"So there is," said Marcia. "I mean, I think I can see one."

"It's there, sure!" said Doris, tying her hood tighter, and taking up the lantern. "You stay here with the Major, and I'll get on down to that cabin, and make whoever is there come up here."

"O Doris! Are you going away off down there alone?"

"Why not? I'm not afraid. I've lived in these mountains too long to be afraid! I know what the light is — some prospectors on their way over the range have camped for the night in one of the cabins, and they'll be different from any prospectors I ever saw if they won't come and help us!"

The Major lay still. "Take Don!" was all he said.

Doris was off the next minute in the stormy darkness, followed by Don. Marcia sat down on the ground beside the Major.

"Plucky girl is she! You're cold, Marshy?"

"I'm afraid you must be!" She unpinned her big bed-blanket, and cuddling down beside him, got it over them both.

"Sho!" said he. "I'm all right. Got on my big fur coat, and clothes enough for an Eskeemoo. But it's the best way for you!"

Little Marcia Ruth noticed that he spoke with chattering teeth, and she was glad she had the blanket, and she tucked it well around his face and neck. Then she waited.

It seemed a long time before she saw the light of the lantern. When she caught the first glimpse of it coming on a curve in the trail, she spoke to the Major.

"Doris is coming — and there's *two* lanterns!" she added, like a sudden hurrah.

"I hope she's got help," he said, with a

smothered groan, the first sound Marcia had heard him make. "I'll not need it if it don't come before very long."

A minute later they heard Don bark.

A few minutes later yet the shrill voice of Doris sounded out. "Here we come! Two big men and myself! You are all right, Mr. Major!"

Marcia saw two stalwart men coming up, revealed by the lanterns.

"I found them. They were down in the old hotel cabin," said Doris; "and they were on their way over to Stray Horse, and camped for the night, just as I reckoned. And they came right straight along with me, just as I banked on them doing!"

"Hello, Cap!" said one of the men, stooping over the Major. "In a kind of a bad box, eh?"

"Bad enough."

"I reckon so. We'll see if we can't get you out of it."

"Can't do it any too soon to suit me."

It was easy for the two prospectors to roll the stone off. They found the Major's leg broken, below the knee.

"Well, we'll have to go slow with you, and careful as we can," said one of the men. "But Jim an' me are 'bout as strong as oxes; an' we can get you up to your shanty some way, even if we have to make a saddle of our hands and carry you so — eh, Jim?"

"That's right, Hank. Sooner we start the better. Let that little bundle 'o pluck with her own lantern go on ahead. T'other little gal with t'other lantern can come on behind. Pair of gritty youngsters you got, my friend! If it hadn't been for them an' the dorg, I reckon you'd gone over the range for good an' all 'fore morning!"

"You're right enough about that," said the Major, fainting dead away as he was suddenly lifted.

XIV.

IN CLOUD HAVEN SHELTER.

IT was long past midnight when Cloud Haven was reached. Strong as the two men were, they were near to being exhausted by the time they laid the Major on the couch before the fire in his cabin.

"But we've got to fix up that leg right away," said the man called Jim. "I worked in a hospital a couple o' years back east, and I know how to handle a broken leg easy. Hank, you jess knock that flour barrel over there to pieces. I want some of the staves. Then, if these young ladies don't know how, you'd better make us some nice hot coffee. Now, Missy, got an old sheet you can strip up jess as I tell you?"

"Marcia can make coffee, and good too," said Doris. "And I'll get you a sheet." And while Marcia put on the tea-kettle she ran in to the big dry-goods box that served as a bureau.

At the end of an hour the Major declared himself to be "as comfortable as though he were in a hospital," and insisted on Marcia and Doris "goin' to bed, regular," and his trained

nurses making themselves at home on the thick rug before the fire. The wind still blew a gale, and the snow was dashing against the glass in the little windows of the cabin. But he found the two girls could not be got away until they had his story. And they wanted him to begin back, too, at the point where Don had overtaken him.

"Well, that was at Gothic City," he said. "It's an all-day tramp from here over to Gothic City. I expected it would be about dark before I got there. I was most in sight though, when I stopped cause I heard a kind of a pant, pant, coming up behind. And if there wasn't that Don pup comin' on the lope, an' tickled most to death because he had trailed me! He's been to Gothic with me a couple o' times, so that once he got on my scent I guess he knowed where I was bound for. Anyhow, there he was, actin' as if he felt mighty smart because he had outwitted me and the little gals. Course he got a good talkin' to — which he didn't give a rap for, the rascal!

"Well, I couldn't take him away off down to Denver with me, an' I couldn't make him come back here alone. So I took him to the cabin of a feller that I knew, an' asked him to keep him for me until I came along back from Denver. Hi Ripley is one o' these good-hearted, obligin' fellers who are so white an' so full o' the grace o' God that they ain't never so happy as when they are doin' some one a good turn;

an Hi' said I could leave the puppy with him an' welcome. So when I went to Denver next day, Don stayed behind at Hi's cabin at the end of a good stout chain — an' there he stayed until I got back this morning, an' we set out for Cloud Haven a-foot. I was late gettin' off, though I spected a blizzard was due before sundown. It was jess along dark when that onmannerly rock broke loose an' come wabbling down to keel me over an' pin me fast, where I reckon I'd been yit if it hadn't been for Don, to begin with. So you see his runnin' away wasn't so bad! And you two little gals was clear grit too! That's all I'm going to tell to-night! But I'll have more to say to-morrow! I haven't told my real story, and I'm not a goin' to at nigh three o'clock in the night!"

Right there the Major stopped and laughed, — a queer chuckle of laughter it was. "Yes," he said, "I rather think I shall tell you a rousin' story to-morrow, and don't you forget it, you little Marshy Ruthie Field!"

"Marcia," said Doris, as they undressed in their own little room, "I guess the Major is a little out of his head to-night. But we won't worry, for the men are here, and he'll prob'bly wake up all right, — sick folks do wake up all right after they've been wanderin' in their head!"

L. of C.

XV.

MARCIA'S GREAT-UNCLE.

JED THORPE arrived at Cloud Haven the next morning; and Joe and Hank went on their way, promising to send "a reg'lar doctor" over from Stray Horse Gulch.

After breakfast the Major called Marcia to sit down on the couch. "You come along too," he called to Doris. "All little gals enjoys a pretty story. This is speshly Marshy's, but you'll enjoy it."

"So you ain't no kin folks in the world that you know of, Marshy?" he began.

"No, you know I told you I did not know of any," said Marshy, thinking that perhaps the Major *was* "a little out of his head."

"Don't remember of hearin' your pa talk any about an uncle of his named Myron Field?"

Marcia thought a moment.

"Yes, I remember pa sometimes spoke of an Uncle Myron, but I don't know as he'd ever seen him. I remember ma said pa was named for his Uncle Myron."

"Well, his Uncle Myron remembered it too.

Kind of an odd stick this Uncle Myron was, wasn't he?"

"I don't know," said Marcia.

"I reckon he was. An' one of his freaks was to go an' make a will leavin' his namesake, your pa, all of his propitty, exceptin' a few hundred dollars to some kin not in any way closely related to him like your pa was. It appears as if your pa was his only nevvy. This Uncle Myron of your pa's died two years ago, an' the lawyer has been all this time tryin' to git on the track o' your pa. He tracked him to Colorado, an' there he lost sight o' him; an' no wonder, trailin' round the way your pa was. He was a mighty hard nevvy to keep track of. Never stayed more than a couple o' moons in one place, now did he?"

"I told you, Mr. Major, that we moved lots," replied Marcia, feeling strange over the way Mr. Major was talking about her pa, with Doris hearing it all.

"Well, it won't be long until your pa's heir makes another move, sorry as I'll be to have her do it. The fact is, Marshy, this Uncle Myron of your pa's was mighty lucky in his later years, an' the propitty he left for your pa figgers up something more than fifty thousand dollars in what they call gilt-aidged securities — that means it's as good as so much cash-money in the bank. An' your parents all bein' gone, this propitty jess natchrelly comes to you; an' a little girl with that much of a bank account hasn't no

bizness foolin' away her time at Cloud Haven when she ought to be in a good school. I've seen an' talked with Mr. Jared B. Upton, the lawyer from the east who has charge of the bizness of this late Mr. Myron Field, your great-uncle — an' a mighty nice man he is. Fact is, if I ever bumped up agin a Christian gentleman I bumped up against one in your pa's uncle's lawyer. We talked matters over, an' he went an' got me app'nted your gardeen; so you air a good deal more my little gal than you was when I went away t'other day. Well, you know little gals has to mind their gardeens, an' so you have to do as I say, an' go down to Denver next week an' start in at a real nice school fer gals of about your age, kep' by one o' the finest wimmen I ever met. I know from her talk that she will be as good as a second gardeen. They tell me that she's a real mother to her scholars."

Doris had not spoken at all. And now Marcia was silent. The Major said no more. He looked happy, and still he didn't look happy. Pretty soon he happened to see Doris's little hand and Marcia's little hand stealing up to meet each other.

"If Doris could only go with me!" said Marcia then, wistfully.

"See there now, how great minds move along in the same channels," said the Major. "That same idee come to me when I was planning away off in Denver; an' I talked to Miss Vane, the lady that keeps that school an' she said it

would be too bad not to fix it up fer Doris to come along too! I told her this Doris of ours was wild as a colt; but she said that didn't make no difference, for she liked smart, snappy little gals. She said she made great ladies of 'em. So, Doris, as I've talked with your pa afore you was waked up in your little bed along with Marshy, you'd best git your Saratogy out, an' go to packin' it so as to go along with Marshy. An' the part of the expense your pa can't afford to pay, I'll be responsible fer, seein' as I had such good luck sellin' a little mine over on Windy Mountain while I was gone to Denver. And the condition on which I'll let you both go an' leave me is that you both strike a bee-line for Cloud Haven the day school is out next summer, an' that you both stay here until time to go back to school in the fall."

The two little girls sat on the side of the Major's couch, facing each other, silent. They had the feeling that such little girls have after they have been reading a fine first-class fairy tale. With a fine first-class fairy tale, the more wonderful and breathless it is the more truly real it seems to you, and for a long time you do not care to talk about it.

At last said Doris, "Marcia, what fun it would be?"

Marcia looked big-eyed and frightened. Still, at last, she smiled at Doris.

"And of course, when you're here, I'll make you wash all the dishes and keep the cabin like

a new pin, on the theory that little gals shouldn't grew up ignorant of keepin' house," went on the Major, brushing away a happy sort of a big tear.

Big Jed Thorpe had gratefully agreed to the Major's plan, and early in the following week he took Marcia and Doris to their new and beautiful home in Denver. It had been arranged that Jed should then hasten back to Cloud Haven and spend the winter with the Major, who had been left in the care of Lem Hall while he was gone.

Marcia's first letter to her guardian came soon — the Major had arranged with little Marcia that she was to call him "Guardian" all his life.

DEAR GUARDIAN : —

We got here all right, and Doris's father took good care of us all the way. Doris had never been on the cars before, and she thought it was fine. She thinks Denver is a wonderful place, and so do I. We like Miss Vane a hundred times as much as you did. Doris and I have a lovely room together ; but it is not any cosier than the cabin at Cloud Haven, way up on Old Baldy, where we are going to have such good times next summer. We have to study hard, because Doris and I never studied before like the other girls; but we don't mind that, only Doris says she would like to fly out of the window sometimes and fly on up to Cloud Haven and back. We talk about your poor leg every night. Doris says she don't think that her father will wash the dishes as clean as we washed them, and she says for you to be sure to tell him to scald the dish-cloths every day, and remember to shower the geraniums every Saturday morning. We both think that you are awful good, and that you have been awful good to both of us. I think of you when I take out that piece of poetry you gave me to learn. I know it all now. I will

write the last verse for you, in my letter, for I don't know that you ever learned it. I'm afraid you will miss it in your pocket-book.

"If any watchful thought of ours
Can make some soul the stronger,
If any cheery smile of ours
Can make its brightness longer,
Then let us speak that thought to-day
With tender eyes a-glowing,
So God may grant some weary one
Shall reap from our glad sowing."

I have said all of the verses to Miss Vane, and she says they are very nice, and that I am reaping from the kindness you sowed when you took me in the way you did. I am to speak them in school next Friday. Doris sends love. So good-by, dear Guardian, from both your little girls. Love to Don and Mr. Jed Thorpe.

MARCIA.
&
DORIS.

Sept 16 1901

AUG 30 1901

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